



The River Walk: Hammersmith Bridge to Putney Bridge

In the early days, this section of the Fulham riverside was farm land, mainly orchards and market gardens and the Bishops of London were the Lords of the Manor. In the 18th century it would have been interspersed with large country houses and a century or so later many of these houses would have been sold or fallen into disrepair to be replaced by industrial undertakings and commercial wharves. By the end of the 20th century these in turn had been largely replaced by or converted to apartment blocks and cafes.

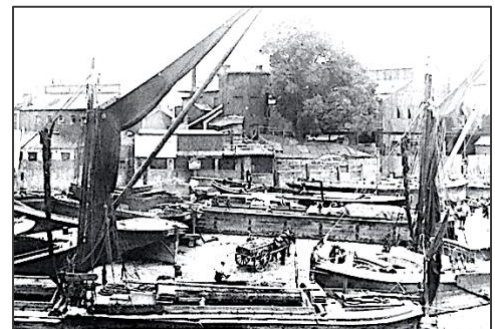
Almost the first thing you notice walking along the towpath south from Hammersmith Bridge is the inlet known as **Parrs Ditch** just before Riverside Studios. This marks the historic boundary between Hammersmith and Fulham and would have been a main route from the river to the village of Hammersmith. The watercourse is now culverted underground and one of “London’s Lost Rivers”.

If you were on the shore, you might see this plaque on the river wall.



The **Riverside Studios** reopened in November 2019 following the closure of the old studios in 2014. The former Studios and the neighbouring Queen's Wharf have been replaced by this new state of the art theatrical and media building across both sites with apartments above. The old studios were associated with some famous films, such as *The Seventh Veil* (1945) starring James Mason, *The Happiest Days of Your Life* (1950) starring Margaret Rutherford and *Father Brown* (1954) starring Alec Guinness. In 1954 the studios were bought by the BBC and many well known programmes including *Dixon of Dock Green*, *Hancock's Half Hour* and *Z Cars* were filmed there.

This modern building is a far cry from the two engineering works that were originally on the site. In 1867 the brothers, John and Henry Gwynne, both civil engineers, had founded the Hammersmith Works on the southern part of the site and in 1874 Rosser & Russell, also an engineering company, took on the Queen’s Wharf to the north. In 1900 the area would have looked like this photograph when viewed from Hammersmith Bridge.



The **boundary between Fulham & Hammersmith** has shifted slightly over the years but the Fulham Society uses the boundaries of the old Metropolitan Borough of Fulham. This ran along Chancellors Road and reached the river just south of the statue of **Capability Brown**. The statue of the great 18th century landscape gardener was unveiled in 2017 and shows the garden designer walking home to his house on Hammersmith Mall. It was sculpted by Laury Dizengremel and cast at the foundry used by Ai Wei-Wei in Chengdu.

Fulham Reach is a vast development offering apartments, shops, bars, restaurants and water sports facilities.

If you had been travelling along the river in the seventeenth century you would have come to the Great House, built early in the reign of Charles I by Sir Nicholas Crispe (ca. 1600-1666) and stretching south as far as Crabtree Farm. As a prominent Royalist, his estates were removed after the execution of Charles I but he managed to retrieve them with the Restoration. Later, the house was bought by Prince Rupert for his mistress and in 1749 by George Dodington, the future Lord Melcombe. In 1792 it was bought by



the Margrave of Brandenburg and became known as Brandenburg House. After the Margrave's death, his wife lent the house to Queen Caroline of Brunswick, separated wife of George IV, who kept her small rival court here. Caroline fell ill and died there on the 7 August, 1821 and soon after the house was pulled down.

The land was sold and on the site were built the first and largest of the industrial development schemes that were soon to stretch right along the riverside. The Haig Distillery (first known as the Hammersmith Distillery) was erected in 1857 on part of the grounds, and in 1872 Alexander Manbré built his sugar refinery (known as the Manbré Saccharine Works) on the remainder.



By the 1980s, both factories had closed down and the sites were vacated to be replaced by the present Fulham Reach. During excavations, some remains of a Saxon settlement (end of 6th century), such as sunken huts, pottery, even a horse, were found.



The 1890s onwards saw a sustained period of **wharf construction**. You can see signs of the warehouses and the historic names all along the river. **Thames Wharf** was originally an industrial site containing the Duckham's oil facility. The works were closed in 1979 and it was acquired by the Richard Rogers Partnership in 1983 and converted into offices, workshops and housing. The Duckham's office block dating from the 1950s became the home of the architectural practice and was extended upwards with a great semi-circular roof. On the ground floor, the famous River Café was opened by Ruth Rogers and Rose Gray.



Palace Wharf replaced the Maltings in 1907 and for many years the wharf was the home of the works' of fibrous plaster firm, George Jackson & Sons. Now it is town houses and luxury apartments.

The Thames & Palace wharves as they were in 1900 and are today.

The Crabtree was described in earlier times as "an insignificant village consisting of half a dozen houses inhabited by gardeners, brick makers etc together with a small inn." In the 1760s the pub had been known as 'The Pot House' after a pottery operating in the area and only later becoming known as The Crabtree. The postcard on the right shows the original pub c1890.



The Crabtree was rebuilt in 1898 on the same site but far larger than its predecessor. Until very recently it was the only place you could get a drink or coffee along the Fulham riverside.

At **Fulham Football Club's Craven Cottage stadium** you do, for the first time, have to leave the river and walk inland. The original Craven Cottage, built in 1780 by Lord Craven, was a pretty thatched roof house with an elevated terrace along the river side. It was destroyed by fire in 1888.



The Fulham Football Club first came across the land in 1894. The first football match with gate receipts was against Minerva on 10 October 1896. The ground's first stand was built shortly afterwards. Over the years more stands have been added and the latest is currently being constructed. This will extend the seating capacity to 30,000 and will include a river walk open to the public at all times save when there is a match.

Immediately past the stadium, is **Bishop's Park**, the public park surrounding Fulham Palace that was originally part of the Bishops' lands. It is a strange shape with a long area beside the river and a spur reaching up to Fulham Palace Road and a very thin, little used, area bordering the Fulham Palace Road. In the middle is Fulham Palace and the allotments (until recently part of the Palace). Each section was added to the park at different times over a period of about 20 years and was deliberately designed for different activities: promenading along the river, refreshment and education, sport and children.



This is the place to leave the towpath and go to visit Fulham Palace. <https://www.fulhampalace.org/>

All Saints Church

The tower of All Saints Church, the ancient parish church of Fulham is the oldest church building in Fulham. It is not known for certain when the first church was built but it is likely there was one in the twelfth century and probably earlier. Certainly there was a church in 1242 and the first known burial in the adjoining churchyard was Richard Colman in 1376.



The Victorians decided the old church should be replaced. Mr Walford, a nineteenth writer on London described it as “an irregular and barn-like structure with a low red tiled roof” and “one of the worst specimens of suburban churches which have of late years so rapidly and happily disappeared before the growing taste for a purer and more devotional style of church architecture.” Sir Gilbert Scott was commissioned to design a larger building, entirely different form the old one but, perhaps fortuitously, the parish could not afford it. Ten years later in 1880 Arthur Blomfield, architect son of the Bishop of London (and born in Fulham Palace), designed instead the present building which retains the ancient tower of Kentish ragstone and features the battlements of the old building.

The towpath continues under Putney Bridge where trains and buses can be found.

A more detailed version of this walk can be found on the [H&F Libraries & Archives Blog](#).

The historic photographs come from the Hammersmith & Fulham Archives; the modern ones are my own.

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